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ABSTRACT

A one-week orientation program designed to increase the effectiveness of foreign teaching assistants (FTA) is described. As the program developed, a decision was made to include non-FTAs with the result that the English language proficiency of the participants covered a wide range and the objectives of the program were mixed. Because of the inclusion on non-FTAs, the focus of the program was expanded to address both the academic needs of the graduate students and the teaching-oriented needs of the FTAs. Oral and listening skills were emphasized as well as presentation techniques and communication strategies. Methodology involved extensive use of videotape recordings to help students improve their oral presentation techniques and their note-taking and test-taking skills. Other exercises during the week focused on group interaction, grammar, and program evaluation. One conclusion regarding the one-week program was that its greatest value lay in the opportunity it provided foreign students to meet each other. (AMH)

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A LANGUAGE SKILLS ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Introduction

Presented with a growing population of foreign teaching assistants (TA's) as well as complaints from undergraduates about foreign TA intelligibility, administrators at the University of California at Irvine (UCI) decided to institute a program aimed at increasing the classroom effectiveness of foreign TA's. The program was envisioned as having two separate phases: An intensive one-week program to be held during Fall Orientation Week and an ongoing program to be offered throughout the academic year.

Inasmuch as there was no existing ESL program at UCI, a search began to find individuals who could develop a curriculum for the one-week program and who could serve as instructors. Contact was established with Dr. Frances Hinofotis, who had been instrumental in developing a course to improve foreign TA communication skills at UCLA (Bailey, 1977; Hinofotis and Bailey, 1978). This course, Advanced Oral Communication for Foreign Students (English 34), closely paralleled the proposed course for foreign TA's at UCI. Administrators at UCI therefore asked if two UCLA graduate students could be recommended to assume responsibility for the one-week program, and we were suggested as consultants.[1]

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Early in the planning stage, an administrative decision was made to expand the one-week orientation to include both TA and non-TA foreign graduate students. Thus the original conception of the program was modified. Our report here details the following aspects of the orientation program:

1) the student population involved
2) the rationale for the syllabus
3) the use of video recordings to improve student presentation techniques
4) video playback of university lectures
5) simulated testing situations
6) communication exercises of a role-playing and problem-solving nature
7) student evaluations
8) suggestions for similar programs

Student Population

The student population of the Irvine program was a highly heterogeneous one. In addition to the approximately equal numbers of TA and non-TA participants, the students in the program came from a wide variety of language, cultural and academic backgrounds. Of the 29 students involved in the orientation program, 17 had studied previously at American universities, and a number of these were returning rather than incoming students at UC Irvine. Another difference involved the proficiency of the participants: As determined by the UCLA English as a Second Language Placement Exam (ESLPE) the English proficiency of the participants ranged from beginning/intermediate to advanced (cf. Table 1).

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TABLE 1

Range of L_2 Proficiency among Orientation Program Participants

ESLPE Score (maximum score = 100)	Level of Proficiency	Number of Students at each Level
33 - 51	Beginning/Low Intermediate	3
52 - 65	Intermediate	6
66 - 79	Advanced	10
80+	Exempt	7
		26

Level of Proficiency above corresponds roughly with ESL course levels at UCLA. Thus, if the Irvine students had been enrolled at UCLA, three would have been required to take the beginning ESL course, six would have been required to take the intermediate course, etc. At UCLA students with scores of 80 or above are not required to enroll in ESL courses.

Needs Analysis

Due to time constraints and the unavailability of participants, it appeared unfeasible to conduct a formal needs analysis of the student population. However, where possible, an attempt was made to collect background data such as names of the students, their native countries, language backgrounds, and major fields of study. Since ESL activities were coordinated through the UCI Learning Skills Center, we were able to obtain relevant information on the general foreign student population from the instructors and counselors at the Center. This information, added to our own experiences with similar foreign student populations on the UCLA campus, proved valuable in developing the program syllabus.

Program Logistics

Many problems which arose in the program planning stage involved such issues as how to divide the students into two groups of approximately equal size, which instructor to assign to which group and how to arrange class sessions so as not to conflict with other Orientation Week activities. Though routine for the most part, the problems of program planning were compounded by the heterogeneous character of the student population.

While initial consideration was given to dividing the groups according to TA/non-TA status, or to dividing them into two levels of proficiency, we decided instead to divide the two groups randomly, and to change the group rosters on a day-to-day basis. This decision was based on our belief that by mixing

more proficient students with less proficient ones, there would be a greater opportunity for peer instruction. Additionally, we felt that by daily reassigning students to groups, social interaction among students would be increased. Finally, it was our hope that dividing the two groups in this way would avoid the stigma associated with being placed in the "lower" of two groups.

The problem of how to assign instructors to groups solved itself in that some activities seemed conducive to team teaching with one large group while other activities, such as video-taping, required smaller groups. Thus for these activities, we divided students into two classes with each instructor supervising the same activity twice; students then rotated from instructor to instructor [cf. Figure 1].

Curriculum Decisions

The administrative decision to open the orientation program to non-TA's complicated curriculum planning. Although the original aim of the program--i.e. to increase TA effectiveness--was called into question by this change, we felt that the immediacy of TA needs justified retaining some of the original emphasis. Nonetheless, in light of the addition of non TA's to the population, and given the dual student/teacher role of TA's, we decided to expand the focus of the program to address both the academic needs of the graduate students and the teaching-oriented needs of the TA's.

Realizing that within one week all we could hope to do was to touch on skill areas required by both groups, we decided to emphasize oral and listening skills needed in an academic envi-

ronment. To meet the needs of TA's, we drew heavily on the precedent set by English 34. As mentioned before, this involved the extensive use of video tape recordings (VTR). We felt that this medium could play a powerful role in helping TA's identify problems in their presentation techniques and communication strategies. Since graduate students are frequently called upon to make brief presentations, such practice seemed relevant to the needs of the non-TA's as well. In meeting the student-oriented needs of both TA's and non-TA's, we decided to further capitalize on the medium of video tape by showing pre-recorded lectures, thereby providing students with listening and note-taking experience. In sum, practice in the following areas appeared most appropriate in meeting the needs of the orientation program participants:[2]

1) organizing and presenting brief talks related to the students' major fields
2) asking and answering questions based on such presentations
3) comprehending university lectures
4) taking notes on university lecture material
5) preparing for multiple-choice and essay type exams based on such lecture material
6) communicating with student peers/professors in an academic framework
7) adjusting culturally to the immediate academic and non-academic environment

Administration of the ESLPE

Despite our decision to integrate the different proficiency levels, we felt that it would be valuable to administer the ESLPE on the morning of the first day of the program.[3] In addition to lending credibility to the orientation program, we believed that the exam might be helpful for a number of other

reasons. First, the examination would provide background information on students, especially in cases in which TOEFL scores were not available. Second, it would help in determining whether we could proceed with the program as planned. Third, it would provide information to assist in limiting enrollment in the event that there were too many students. Finally, we felt it might serve UCI administrators in assessing needs for the ongoing program.

General Overview of the Program

With the exception of the first day, which included the administration of the ESLPE and a campus tour in the morning, the program consisted of five afternoons of approximately four hours of instruction per day. Each day's activities were varied as much as possible by alternating types of activities and modes of instruction. There were approximately three breaks per afternoon, one of which was extended to include refreshments. A schedule of the program is presented below:

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We should note here that we were greatly assisted by the staff of the Learning Skills Center. They were present in the classroom as observers and aides, and did much to alleviate the tasks of classroom management. Since the Learning Skills staff were to be responsible for the second ongoing phase, their involvement in the orientation afforded them the opportunity to get to know the students and thus provide continuity between the two phases of the program.

Figure 1

Program Schedule

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1:00 Immigration Information	1:00 Introduction to the Checklist	1:00 Note-Taking	1:00 University Lecture 1: Political Geography	1:00 Seeing Yourself on Videotape 3
1:30 Welcome & Introductions	2:00 Organization Workshop	2:00 Seeing Yourself on Videotape 2	2:00 Practice Essay Test	2:30 Break
2:30 Break	2:50 Break	3:20 Break	2:50 Break	2:40 University Lecture 2: Western Civilization
2:45 Seeing Yourself on Videotape 1	3:10 Presentation Workshop	3:40 Focus on Question Formation	3:10 Cultural Panel	Practice Objective Test
3:45 Student Teacher Problem Solving Exercise	4:00 Instructor Model Presentation		4:00 Cultural Problem Solving Exercise	4:00 Evaluations & Happy Hour

Arrows in the schedule indicate concurrent sessions during which the students were divided into two groups and taught separately. All other sessions were joint sessions which were team taught.

Administrative Sessions

On the first and last days of the program, there were several sessions which focused on administrative matters. The first afternoon session began with a presentation by the foreign student advisor regarding such matters as immigration and housing. Following this presentation, there was a general introductory session during which we distributed schedules for the week and explained the program objectives. During the last session on Friday, students were asked to evaluate the week-long program.

Student VTR Presentations

As suggested above, the extensive use of video equipment provided the focal point of the orientation program. By way of clarification, we should note that the video tape equipment was used in two different kinds of activities. In one, student presentations were recorded and played back; and in the other, video recordings of university lectures were used to provide practice in listening and note-taking.

The first of these activities, the student VTR presentations, were intended to provide the students with an opportunity to see themselves on video tape and to help them determine where they needed improvement in making oral presentations. During the week-long orientation program, student presentations were taped and played back on the first, third and fifth days.

The first student taping session was designed to familiarize them with the procedure. Students were asked to choose from a list of topics and give an impromptu one-minute talk. The list included topics such as "My initial impressions of the U.S."

and "My major field and why I chose it." Following the taping of student presentations, the recordings were played back and students were given an opportunity to react to their own presentations. Additional comments were kept to a minimum on the first day since the emphasis was more on familiarization with the presentation and taping procedure than on evaluation.

On the second day of the program, four sessions were conducted to help prepare students for the subsequent VTR presentations. These included an introduction to the evaluation checklist,[4] an organization workshop, a presentation workshop, and two demonstration presentations by the course instructors. The introduction to the evaluation checklist involved a discussion and clarification of each evaluative category. Then, using the checklist, students evaluated a short, well-delivered videotaped lecture. After completing the checklist, students discussed their ratings and the rationale for each. While the organization workshop stressed the importance of carefully planning the presentation, the presentation workshop emphasized proper use of visual aids and kinesics. Both workshops were conducted informally and students were encouraged to take a major role in the discussions.

In the fourth preparatory session, we attempted to review the major points presented in the organization and presentation workshops. To demonstrate what would be required of students in their own VTR presentations, we took a concept from our own field, the difference between a phoneme and a morpheme. One instructor provided the students with a model of "what to

do" by presenting the difference as clearly and effectively as possible; the other instructor provided a model of "what not to do." The latter presentation was characterized by distracting gestures, heavy dependence on notes and lack of visual aids. During these demonstrations, students had two additional opportunities to use the evaluation checklist.

For the second and third VTR sessions, students were asked to present a 3-minute explanation of a concept from their major field. Using the checklist, the instructor and students evaluated each speaker's presentation. Before opening the floor to group critique, the presentations were played back, and the presenters were invited to comment on their own performance. Following this, others had the opportunity to make comments before giving the presenter the completed checklist.

Note-taking and Test-taking Experience

The second VTR component, the video-recorded university lectures, provided the students with note-taking and test-taking practice. Whereas the VTR student presentations discussed above were aimed more at the skills that a TA might need, the note-taking and test-taking experiences attempted to provide a preview of parts of American academic life which would be especially relevant to the newly-arrived foreign student.

VTR lectures were used on three different occasions. The first lecture was a simulated humanities lecture which had been prepared for note-taking practice in advanced ESL classes at UCLA. Students were given partially-completed notes and were told to fill in what was missing. Following the exercise, we

asked students to share what they had written to verify that they had comprehended the major points of the lecture. The second two recordings were of actual UCLA lectures in political geography and history. For these, students were required to take notes on their own. Following the geography lecture, we gave the students sample essay questions and time to prepare answers in study groups. They were then given an essay question based on the lecture and were allowed fifteen minutes to organize and write their response. The history lecture was followed by a multiple choice test which was provided to give students practice with another mode of testing.

Communication Exercises

As we have noted above, students had frequent opportunities for group work in class. While group work was incidentally incorporated into a number of activities, two sessions focused solely on group interaction. The first of these was a problem-solving and role-playing exercise involving such issues as grading, cheating, and plagiarism. The second session was an adaptation of a Values Clarification (1972) exercise concerning foreign student attitudes toward Americans. This session followed a cultural panel during which the students related their problems of acculturating to American life.

Grammar

Only one session related to grammar. This session was entitled "Focus on Question Formation" and included a review of question word order in direct and embedded questions.

Program Evaluation

On the last day, students were given an opportunity to evaluate the program. We asked them to rate each session on a scale of 0 to 5; and for each session, we provided space for additional comments. Due to the fact that there were a number of other conflicting activities which students were obliged to attend during Orientation Week, and to the fact that attendance was more or less optional, student attendance fluctuated. Of the 26 students on our original attendance roster, an average of 20 attended daily. Sixteen of these students completed the program evaluation. Results of the evaluations are presented in Table 2.

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Ratings on the six-point scale range from a high of 4.79 to a low of 3.11. The VTR student presentations received the highest ratings of 4.79 for sessions two and three and 4.77 for the preliminary session. Next highest were the practice objective test (4.58), the cultural panel (4.50) and the instructor demonstration presentations (4.55). In descending order, lowest ratings were given to the session on question formation (3.71), the two communication exercises (3.67 and 3.64) and the campus tour (3.11).

In their written comments, most of the students praised the program. They expressed their approval of the program's focus on global communication skills rather than on discrete points

TABLE 2

Results of Student Evaluations of the One-Week Orientation Program

	Session	Mean	n		Session	Mean	n
1.	Student VTR Presentation 2	4.79	14	10.	Introduction to Checklist	3.92	12
2.	Student VTR Presentation 3	4.79	14	11.	University Lecture 2	3.92	12
3.	Student VTR Presentation 1	4.77	13	12.	University Lecture 1	3.91	11
4.	Practice Objective Test	4.58	12	13.	Practice Essay Test	3.91	11
5.	Instructor Demonstration Presentations	4.55	11	14.	Organization Workshop	3.83	12
6.	Cultural Panel	4.50	12	15.	Focus on Question Formation	3.71	14
7.	Note-taking	4.43	14	16.	Cultural Problem Solving Exercise	3.67	12
8.	Immigration Information	4.23	13	17.	Student/Teacher Problem Solving Exercise	3.64	14
9.	Presentation Workshop	4.10	11	18.	Campus Tour	3.11	9

Students ranked the above sessions on a scale of 0 to 5. Sixteen students (N = 16) completed evaluation forms; n represents the number of students who participated in a session.

of language. Repeatedly, students emphasized the value of seeing themselves on videotape and of getting to know other foreign students. Several of them acknowledged their gratitude to the university for setting up the program. The major criticism of the program had to do with time factors. Some students complained that the program was too concentrated and that breaks weren't long enough, and others recommended that the program be spread out over a longer period of time. It was also suggested that the program start earlier so that students would have more time before school began. As it was, the program ended on Friday and regular classes began on the following Monday.

Instructor Reactions

In response to the student evaluations, we would like to add some of our own reactions. First, we too feel that the VTR student presentations were the most valuable aspect of the program; however, we fear that some of the students gave the activity a high rating for the wrong reasons. Although some students were well-prepared and utilized the experience to its fullest, others were unprepared and failed to attend to the content and organization of their presentations. In short, the overall quality of the student VTR presentations was not as high as we had hoped, and we feel that the student ratings reflect more the superficial thrill of seeing oneself on tape than an objective evaluation of its instructional value. Secondly, it is interesting to note that student ratings of communication activities were among the lowest, and yet in our opinion these were some of the liveliest and most popular ac-

tivities. By way of explanation, we believe that many foreign students tend to place more value on teacher-centered instruction than on peer interaction/instruction. In view of our own positive evaluation of these activities, the opportunities they provided for socialization, and their relatively high ratings [3.67 and 3.64], we would still include communication exercises in any similar program.

Although we feel that the orientation program was a success, we do not wish to delude ourselves about how much students "learned" in one week. While we attempted to expose students to some ideas and skills which might help them in their academic careers as students and TA's, we feel that the most positive aspects of the orientation were the possibilities provided for students to get acquainted with other foreign stucents and with various offices and individuals on campus. Thus, in our opinion, the advantages of a one-week orientation program exist more in the realm of affect than in that of learning and instruction.

Conclusion

In closing, we would like to offer several suggestions for administrators who are considering the establishment of special programs for foreign TA's and/or foreign students. We think it is important that administrators carefully consider the objectives of any special program and limit them according to the time available for instruction. If, for example, the aim of the program is to familiarize students with the campus and with certain aspects of university life, then a one-week program

may well be appropriate. More time will obviously be needed, however, if the program aims at improving TA intelligibility or at improving the study skills of foreign students.

In addition to specifying the nature of the program, we feel that it is equally important to specify the population of students for whom the program is intended. Criteria should be established to determine who should attend the classes and, if necessary, on what basis enrollment should be limited. In this regard, consideration may need to be given to such factors as test scores, previous grades, and personal or departmental referral. Additionally, a decision should be made as to whether attendance is required or optional.

Finally, the scheduling of special programs merits the support and cooperation of the entire university community. In being asked to attend these programs, foreign students should not be isolated from the mainstream of campus life. Thus, interdepartmental efforts should be made to schedule such programs at times which are least likely to conflict with other campus activities. If programs for foreign students are deemed important, then they should be scheduled at times which allow students to attend and at the same time do not deprive them of the opportunity to participate in other orientation programs where they can integrate with their native-speaking peers.

FOOTNOTES

[1]We would like to express our thanks to Frances Hinofotis and Kathleen Bailey for recommending us to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Admissions at UCI. In addition, we acknowledge our appreciation to Frances, Kathleen and to Susan Stern for continuelly sharing with us materials they developed for English 34, as well as reports on various aspects of the course development.

[2]Though determined solely on the basis of instructor intuition of academic student needs, the above list exhibits a high degree of similarity of students' own perceptions of their academic needs, as determined by a survey of the UCLA Service Course Committee (Bailey, 1977).

[3]We wish to thank Earl Rand for his cooperation in providing us with the ESLPE.

[4]The "checklist" or oral presentation rating instrument used in the program was adapted from Hinofotis, Bailey and Stern (1979).

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